



THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST:

Why is it better to be last?

Student Guide

KINGDOM

- ? ▪ When was the last time you chose to be “last” instead of “first” (e.g., let your sibling have “shotgun” in the car, let a friend choose the movie or TV show to watch, offered to clean the dishes without being asked)? Why did you do that?
- Why does it seem so unnatural to try and be last?

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT:

“I hope I finish last.” Has anyone ever said that to you? That would be pretty weird, right? Imagine a commercial for a brand new sneaker in which a star athlete sprints and spins, showing off the shoe. Then the athlete ends the commercial by saying, “With these shoes, you’ll always finish last.” That wouldn’t make sense. We know how the world works. Winning matters. And if you ask most people how to “win” at life, their answer might sound like a strategy for winning a board game like Monopoly or The Game of LIFE: “Get a good education so you can find a well-paying job so you can buy a huge house so you can retire in luxury. The other players are your enemies, so you should do whatever you can to push them back and propel yourself forward. In the end, whoever has the most power and money wins!”

But God’s kingdom has a different system for “winning” at life. According to God’s rulebook, people who step on others and clamber to the top of the heap at the expense of those below them will end up losing—not always in this life, but certainly in eternity. And those who put themselves last by serving people in need and propping others up to success will be made first in God’s kingdom. At the end of the day, God doesn’t care about how successful you’ve been. He’s more interested in your relationship with him and how you’ve treated others. Jesus’ followers and friends had to learn this lesson the hard way. In the following passage, note how Jesus flips his disciples’ expectations on their heads.

Read: Mark 9:35–45

Answer:

- No one can argue that James, John, and the other disciples sacrificed nothing to follow Jesus. They gave up so much! So why does Jesus rebuke them?
- What were the disciples concerned with? What did Jesus want them to focus on?
- Do you expect to get more from God by doing certain things or following him longer than someone else? Is this the way God’s kingdom works?





- How did Jesus demonstrate to his disciples and to us what it means to make yourself “last” instead of “first”?



A SECOND LOOK:

Just as God’s grace often works in mysterious ways, God often uses people the world wouldn’t expect. God chooses to use people who follow the principle that Jesus shares with his disciples in Mark 9:35, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” Richard Allen was born a slave. In 1760, when Richard Allen was born, people could be legally bought and sold in the United States. This may seem strange now, but to Richard, it was all he’d ever known. The person who owned Richard was not a Christian, but he allowed Richard to go to church. Allen embraced Christ as his Savior and worked hard to show his owner the dramatic difference Christ makes in a person’s life. Many slaveholders thought that attending church would make slaves lazy, but Richard and his brothers pushed themselves to show that Christ’s influence actually makes a person better. Through Richard’s example, his owner started following Christ and came to realize that slavery was wrong. He allowed Richard to purchase his freedom.

It took him five years, but Richard eventually worked enough to become a free man. What did he do with his newfound freedom? Richard devoted himself to spreading the message of Christ’s love and grace. He started the first independent black denomination in the United States, and oversaw its growth and ministry. Because God chose him for a unique purpose and brought him out of slavery, Richard focused on helping other black people and slaves claim the dignity with which God made them. He provided opportunities for them to worship God without fear of oppression and operated a station on the Underground Railroad to help slaves find their way to freedom. In Richard Allen, God chose someone society deemed the absolute “last” and used him to help put others first. Richard was able to do amazing things for God’s kingdom that other people could never have done.

Answer:

- Even though Richard Allen was considered the “last” in society, how did he treat others?
- Do you think God’s opinion of Richard changed when he became free?
- When Richard became free, he could have used his freedom to keep moving forward and to concentrate on his own wants and needs. What did he do instead?
- Who are the hardest people to serve in your life?

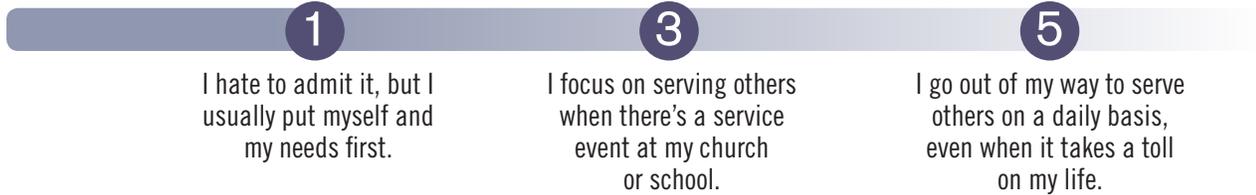


- Most of us won't experience difficulties like Richard Allen's, but you may still feel like you're at the bottom of society's hierarchy (below your government, parents, school administrators, teachers, coaches, and even upper-classmen). How can you start impacting the lives of others, even when you're pretty far down the social ladder?



RATE IT:

Give yourself a 1 to 5 rating. How well are you doing at putting others first and yourself last?



APPLY IT:

Write down one way you are going to apply what you now know about being a servant in God's kingdom. What difference will it make in your life this week? How will you apply it to your life?

Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



THINK ABOUT IT:

“And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, ‘If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.’ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me,’” (Mark 9:35-37).